

Message Text

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AMEMBASSY MOSCOW

USLO PEKING

AMCONSUL BREMEN

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AMCONSUL MUNICH

AMCONSUL STUTTGART

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BONN 00619

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, GW

SUBJECT: FRANZ-JOSEF STRAUSS: THE "STEHAFMAENNCHEN"
OF GERMAN POLITICS

SUMMARY: FRANZ-JOSEF STRAUSS' CURRENT VISIT TO CHINA
IS INTENDED TO HELP CREATE THE KIND OF BROAD IMAGE HE
WANTS TO PROJECT IN PREPARATION FOR THE 1976 ELECTION
CAMPAIGN. HOWEVER, AN INTERVIEW WHICH HE GAVE RECENTLY
HAS REKINDLED PUBLIC ATTENTION IN AND NEGATIVE COMMENT ON
HIS CONTROVERSIAL ROLE IN THE 1962 SPIEGEL AFFAIR. THE
VEHEMENCE SHOWN BY STRAUSS IN THE INTERVIEW DOES NOT
SQUARE WITH THE NEED FOR HIM TO BROADEN HIS POLITICAL
SUPPORT BEYOND THE HARD-CORE CONSERVATIVE VOTE. STRAUSS
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IS ACTUALLY LESS CONSERVATIVE THAN HE IS REPRESENTED

BUT HE WILL HAVE TO DEVELOP A MORE MODERATE PROFILE IF HE SERIOUSLY WISHES TO FIGURE AS A POSSIBLE CDU/CSU CHANCELLOR CANDIDATE. SHORT OF ACHIEVING THIS GOAL, IT IS GENERALLY EXPECTED THAT HE WILL OCCUPY A KINGMAKER ROLE IN HIS PARTY FOR 1976. IN ANY CASE, THE RECENT INTERVIEW ILLUSTRATES SOME OF STRAUSS' LIMITATIONS AND WAS NOT AN AUSPICIOUS AUGURY FOR THE EFFORT TO BROADEN HIS NATIONAL BASE. END SUMMARY

1. IN AN INTERVIEW LAST WEEK WITH A RELATIVELY OBSCURE GERMAN SOCIETY MAGAZINE ESPRIT FRANZ-JOSEF STRAUSS REOPENED THE WOUNDS OF THE 1962 SPIEGEL AFFAIR. IN THE INTERVIEW STRAUSS DENIED ANY WRONGDOING AND, AMONG OTHER THINGS, IMPLIED SPIEGEL BRIBED AND BLACKMAILED A CONSTITUTIONAL COURT JUDGE. THE OCTOBER 1962 AFFAIR CENTERED ON FEDERAL LEGAL ACTION AGAINST SPIEGEL IN WHICH AUTHORITIES MADE A NIGHT-TIME RAID ON SPIEGEL OFFICES IN HAMBURG AND BONN. SPIEGEL'S PUBLISHER, AUGSTEIN, AND ANOTHER KEY STAFFER WERE ARRESTED AND CHARGED WITH TREASON FOR PUBLISHING MILITARY SECRETS IN AN ARTICLE ON GERMAN DEFENSE STRATEGY. NONE OF THE ACCUSED WERE CONVICTED (CHARGES WERE LATER DROPPED) AND IN THE AFTERMATH OF THE RAID STRAUSS WAS FORCED TO RESIGN AS DEFENSE MINISTER WHEN IT WAS DISCLOSED THAT HE HAD LIED TO THE BUNDESTAG ABOUT HIS INVOLVEMENT IN THE AFFAIR. IT IS GENERALLY ACCEPTED THAT STRAUSS WAS THE GUIDING SPIRIT BEHIND THE LEGAL ACTION AIMED AT DISCREDITING AUGSTEIN'S MAGAZINE WHICH HAD A HISTORY OF ATTACKING STRAUSS. AUGSTEIN, THE EX-JUDGE, AND OTHERS ACCUSED BY STRAUSS IN THE "ESPRIT" INTERVIEW REACTED SHARPLY AND REJECTED HIS LATEST ACCUSATIONS.

2. WHILE THE RESURRECTION OF THE SPIEGEL AFFAIR IN ITSELF IS NOT SURPRISING GIVEN THE PUBLIC DISCUSSION ABOUT STRAUSS BEING A POSSIBLE CHANCELLOR CANDIDATE AGAINST SCHMIDT IN 1976, THE FACT THAT STRAUSS HIMSELF CHOSE TO REOPEN THE ISSUE AS WELL AS THE VEHEMENCE OF HIS ATTACKS AGAINST AUGSTEIN, SPIEGEL, AND THE OTHER PARTICIPANTS IS STRIKING. IT IS CLEAR THAT STRAUSS FEELS THE NEED TO DISPEL HIS REPUTATION AS A MAN OBSESSED WITH POWER RESULTING FROM SUCH PAST ACTIONS AS HIS EXTRA-LEGAL ACTS.

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VITIES DURING THE SPIEGEL AFFAIR. THE TITLE OF THE "ESPRIT" INTERVIEW, FOR EXAMPLE, WAS "HOW DANGEROUS ARE YOU, HERR STRAUSS?". ONE FDP POLITICIAN CHARACTERIZED THE "ESPRIT" INTERVIEW AS EVIDENCE THAT STRAUSS HAD BEEN LISTENING TO HIS "INTELLIGENT" FRIENDS AGAIN WHO HAVE ABSOLUTELY NO FEEL FOR POLITICS.

3. STRAUSS IS ONE OF THE MOST CLEVER, COMPLEX AND

INTERESTING POLITICIANS ON THE GERMAN SCENE TODAY. HE
IS ALSO THE "STEHAFMAENNCHEN" (ONE OF THOSE DOLLS THAT
NO MATTER HOW HARD YOU HIT IT ALWAYS RETURNS TO A STAND-
ING POSITION) OF GERMAN POLITICS. AFTER RESIGNING AS
DEFENSE MINISTER IN 1962 AND NARROWLY AVOIDING LEGAL
REPERCUSSIONS, HE LATER RETURNED TO THE CABINET AS
FINANCE MINISTER IN THE 1966 GRAND COALITION. (IRONI-
CALLY, THE SPIEGEL EDITOR, CONRAD AHLERS, WHOM STRAUSS
HAD ILLEGALLY ORDERED ARRESTED WHILE AHLERS WAS ON

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VACATION IN SPAIN, BECAME THE GOVERNMENT'S SPOKESMAN IN

THE GRAND COALITION.) STRAUSS HAS REBOUNDED FROM OTHER POLITICAL SETBACKS AND FOLLOWING THE SMASHING CSU VICTORY IN THE 1974 BAVARIA ELECTIONS IS ONCE AGAIN SERIOUSLY MENTIONED AS A POSSIBLE CDU CHANCELLOR CANDIDATE OR PERHAPS AS VICE CHANCELLOR SHOULD THERE BE ANOTHER GRAND COALITION.

4. THERE IS CONSIDERABLE SKEPTICISM ABOUT STRAUSS' CHANCES TO OBTAIN ENDORSEMENT FROM THE NATIONAL CDU WITHOUT BADLY SPLITTING THE PARTY. IN THE PAST, CONVENTIONAL WISDOM HELD THAT STRAUSS COULD ONLY BECOME CONFIDENTIAL

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CHANCELLOR SHOULD GERMANY BE IN THE GRIPS OF A CRISIS WHICH DROVE THE GERMAN VOTER TO SEEK "A STRONG MAN". STRAUSS HIMSELF HAS MADE SIMILAR STATEMENTS. HOWEVER, AS AN AGING "WUNDERKIND" (ALMOST 60) WHO SEES SOME CHANCE OF SUCCESS UNDER PRESENT CIRCUMSTANCES, IT APPEARS THAT STRAUSS HAS DECIDED NOT TO WAIT FOR A CRISIS WHICH MAY NEVER COME AND TO MAKE HIS MOVE NOW. TO WIN THE NOMINATION HE WILL HAVE TO DEVELOP SUPPORT IN THE NORTHERN AND INDUSTRIAL PARTS OF WEST GERMANY BEYOND HIS NATIVE BAVARIA. THIS WOULD REQUIRE THAT HE CULTIVATE A MORE MODERATE IMAGE AND ALSO APPEAR AS THE SINGLE CDU CANDIDATE WHO COULD BEAT HELMUT SCHMIDT. STRAUSS HAS BEGUN TO MAKE POLITICAL EXCURSIONS INTO THE NORTH AND HE IS EXPECTED TO TAKE AN ACTIVE ROLE IN SUPPORT OF REGIONAL CANDIDATES IN ELECTIONS IN NORTH-RHINE WESTPHALIA AND ELSEWHERE TO DEMONSTRATE HIS POPULARITY, EVEN IN TRADITIONAL WORKING-CLASS AREAS. STRAUSS WILL CONTINUE BUILDING SUPPORT INSIDE THE CDU ORGANIZATION USING THE LEVERAGE OF HIS "KINGMAKER ROLE" WITHIN THE CDU/CSU. HE IS STRONGER WITHIN THE MORE CONSERVATIVE CDU/CSU BUNDESTAG FRAKTION, WHERE HE HAS AN ALLY IN FRAKTION LEADER CARSTENS, THAN IN THE MORE LIBERAL CDU EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE. STRAUSS IS PRESENTLY ON A VISIT TO CHINA WHICH CAN BE SEEN AS AN EFFORT TO DEVELOP HIS REPUTATION AS A "STATESMAN" WHO CAN DEAL WITH EAST AND WEST.

5. POLITICALLY, STRAUSS IS NOT AS CONSERVATIVE AS HIS REPUTATION WOULD HAVE IT. ON ISSUES SUCH AS DEFENSE, ECONOMICS, AND RADICALISM HE IS NOT VERY FAR REMOVED FROM THE VIEWS HELD BY CHANCELLOR SCHMIDT. EVEN IN THE AREA OF OSTPOLITIK, STRAUSS, DESPITE HIS ROLE AS ONE OF THE PRINCIPAL CRITICS OF THE BRANDT GOVERNMENT'S EASTERN TREATIES, IN THE PAST HAS DEMONSTRATED A DEGREE OF FLEXIBILITY (E.G., HIS WRITINGS ON THE SUBJECT IN THE LATE 1960'S). ALL THIS SAID, HOWEVER, STRAUSS FACES AN EXTREMELY DIFFICULT TASK. VOTERS RESPOND AT THE BALLOT BOX TO WHAT THEY PERCEIVE THE CANDIDATES STAND FOR AND

NOT NECESSARILY TO THE ACTUAL POLICY VIEWS OF THE CANDI-
DATES. UNLESS THE INTERNAL SITUATION CHANGES RADICALLY
IN THE FEDERAL REPUBLIC WITHIN THE NEXT TWO YEARS,
STRAUSS WILL HAVE TO BECOME KNOWN AS A MORE CENTRIST
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POLITICIAN BOTH IN ORDER TO OBTAIN CDU ENDORSEMENT AND
TO BE ABLE TO DEFEAT HELMUT SCHMIDT IN THE 1976
ELECTIONS. IT IS ALSO POSSIBLE THAT STRAUSS IS USING
THE THREAT OF HIS CANDIDACY AS A PLOY TO IMPROVE HIS
POWER POSITION IN THE PARTY. HIS VETO POWER OVER WHO
THE CDU/CSU CANDIDATE WILL BE IS ALREADY GENERALLY AC-
CEPTED IN CDU LEADERSHIP CIRCLES AND A STRENGTHENING OF
HIS POSITION WOULD ENABLE HIM TO FURTHER INFLUENCE THE
POLICIES OF THE CDU. HOWEVER,IF STRAUSS IS
SEEKING THE MANTLE OF NATIONAL CDU LEADERSHIP, THE
INTERVIEW IN ESPRIT WAS NOT A VERY AUSPICIOUS
BEGINNING.
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